DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 004 CE 079 190

TITLE	Literacy in Multilingual/Intercultural Settings. Ensuring Universal Rights to Literacy and Basic Education. A Series of 29 Booklets Documenting Workshops Held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg, Germany, July 14-18, 1997).
INSTITUTION	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Hamburg (Germany). Inst. for Education.
ISBN	ISBN-92-82010-89-9
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	20p.; For other booklets in this series, see CE 079 178-206.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: <http://www.education.unesco.org/uie>.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Bilingualism; *Developing Nations; Educational Needs; *Educational Policy; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Intercultural Communication; *Literacy Education; *Multicultural Education; Multilingual Materials; *Multilingualism; Needs Assessment; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning
IDENTIFIERS	Africa; Latin America

ABSTRACT

Because of the significant political implications of first and second language policy, many decision-makers have been reluctant to review language policy in the context of literacy work. Issues that must be considered include the following: whether mother tongue literacy should be a precondition for introduction of a second language in school-based and nonformal settings; conditions under which mother tongue literacy should precede second language literacy; and effects of policies regarding language of instruction on literacy after schooling. In Latin America, the value of native languages and cultures is recognized; the value of culture in bilingual literacy is promoted; and local languages and cultures are being integrated into the educational process. In Africa, on the other hand, African languages are in grave danger, and extra support for them is needed in the schools. Among the issues that must be addressed when imparting language skills in a global language of communication are the following: learners should immediately experience the applicability of their newly acquired language skills; development of simple language units requires cooperation in international research; new didactics and methods must be developed that give equal consideration to everyday use of the language of communication and learning environments outside the school system. (MN)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 435 004

A series of 29 booklets documenting workshops held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education

3e Multilingual/intercultural settings

Literacy in multilingual/intercultural settings

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C A McIntosh

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

CE079190

This publication has been produced by the UNESCO Institute for Education within the context of the follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997.

Readers are reminded that the points of view, selection of facts, and the opinions expressed in the booklets are those that were raised by panellists, speakers and participants during the workshop sessions and therefore do not necessarily coincide with official positions of the UNESCO or of the UNESCO Institute for Education Hamburg. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UNESCO Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of the frontiers of any country or territory.

Theme 3: Ensuring universal rights to literacy and basic education
Booklets under this theme:

3a Literacy in the world and its major regions
3b Literacy and learning strategies
3c Literacy, education and social development
3d Literacy research, evaluation and statistics
3e Literacy in multilingual/intercultural settings
3f Literacy and technology
3g Literacy for tomorrow

UNESCO Institute for Education
Feldbrunnenstrasse 58
D-20148 Hamburg
Germany

Tel.: (+49 40) 44 80 41-0
Fax: (+49 40) 410 77 23

e-mail: uie@unesco.org

homepage: http://www.education.unesco.org/uie

ISBN 92 820 10 89-9
Design by Matthew Partridge, Hamburg
Printed by Druckerei Seemann, Hamburg
1999

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

Literacy in multilingual/intercultural settings

Introduction

Multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception in the majority of countries today. Language has been a crucial factor in the history of both industrialised and developing countries. It is therefore self-evident that language must play a key role in adult literacy today. Language, literacy and power are closely linked.

One of the major constraints in the implementation of an effective literacy programme is the lack of recognition given to realities of language usuage. Almost all multilingual and bilingual countries face this situation. How are international languages to be used to teach literacy in local contexts? Do they simply serve as languages of cultural imperialism? What are the advantages of standardising local languages? Should we be concerned at the disappearance of local languages and cultures?

These and other questions were discussed at a workshop entitled "Literacy in multilingual and inter-cultural settings" by a panel consisting of Enrique Camargo, Bolivia; Gloria Lara Pinto, Honduras; Maurice Tadadjeu, National Research Project for Language Education in Cameroon, (PROPELCA); and Isabella Buagbe, Ministry of Education, Ghana. The chair of the session was Luis de la Torre, Ecuador.

Speakers raised important questions on the issue of literacy in both the mother tongue and in the national languages, in Africa and Latin America.

The CONFINTEA V Agenda for the Future states that "Literacy enables individuals to function effectively in their societies and to fashion and shape individuals. It is a process in which communities effect their own cultural and social transformations in the context of their personal, local and global identities". The workshop made an important plea that local and indigenous knowledge, culture and language need to be integrated with western knowledge into the educational processes, so that adult learning can not only enhance educational capacity but also make learning a joy while respecting peoples' cultural identities.

The situation

A large proportion of children in developing countries are either completely illiterate or have had only rudimentary instruction for just a few years in their mother tongue, before a second, usually international or national language is introduced as the medium of instruction. Lack of proficiency in the second language has been shown to be a key reason for high drop-out and repetition rates, as well as poor achievement in primary and secondary schools. This has negative consequences for employment.

The situation for adult literacy is equally complex. Almost all adult education programmes are voluntary, and language choice is often subject to the varied motivations of learners. Some of them are interested in job promotion, where a global language might be an asset, while others are motivated by a desire to write letters to their families, where a local language might be more suitable.

Because of the significant political implications of first and second language policy, many decision-makers have been reluctant to review language policy in the context of literacy work. It goes without saying that issues of politics and power are inclined to usurp the primacy of language and literacy. Several issues are at stake here:

- whether mother tongue literacy should be a precondition for the introduction of a second language in school-based and non-formal settings;
- under what conditions should mother tongue precede second language literacy;
- how the policies regarding the language of instruction affects literacy after schooling;

The Latin American situation

Most Latin American countries are multicultural and multilingual – implying coexistence of a diversity of languages, cultures, and world views. A basic characteristic of Latin American cultures is their oral tradition. In the past this oral culture with its rules and practices had a place in indigenous communities and societies, until, through conquest and colonisation, the medium of writing was introduced. This led to a tense confrontation and relationship between oral and written traditions. In time, writing became dominant as a new medium of instruction. The transmission of local languages takes place mostly orally, although some religious texts are studied in the local language.

The general attitude today in Latin American countries is that writing is an effective tool for achieving dynamic social and cultural development. But it is also felt that their societies must retain oral knowledge integral to their cultural heritage, and necessary for the survival of indigenous communities. Oral language has been an important factor in ethnic identity and history consciousness, and it is very much evident even today.

The educational situation in Latin America is ridden with problems. In the period between 1945 and 1965 Latin American education systems greatly neglected native culture and languages as governments promoted an active integration policy. The modernisation paradigm held that education was a key prerequisite for modernising and thus for economic growth. Since the idea of modernisation included rapid spread of new technologies and ideas through education and mass media, a common language was considered necessary. This integration through modernisation and the promotion of universal values led to the destruction of language and cultural diversity in Latin America.

Education through a foreign language is one of the main pedagogical and socio-cultural causes for illiteracy. Many school pupils consequently regress into illiteracy because:

- they do not use their literacy skills;
- literacy skills are not useful in their daily life;
- higher value is placed on oral tradition;
- non-formal learning is of poor quality;
- content is not related to the child's world;
- methodologies are not problem-oriented.

This means that illiteracy will not be eradicated unless local languages are developed, to some extent, as languages of literacy.

There is however very little statistical data on mother tongues of illiterates. Nor is there information on the percentage of illiterates among populations obliged to accept instruction in a second or foreign language if they were to attend schools or non-formal courses. In Ecuador in 1990 there were 681,000 illiterates recorded, some 13 per cent of the population, although the actual number of illiterates could be as high as 40 per cent. The percentage of illiteracy or insufficient literacy among indigenous adults is particularly high. In Honduras, indigenous people make up 5 per cent of the population, i.e. 250,000 people. Whereas the literacy figures for the general population is about 48 per cent, it is from 72 to 100 per cent among some indigenous communities.

Although there seems to be a consensus that learning to read and write is most effective in the mother tongue, many Latin American Indian societies are ambivalent in this matter and feel that they should not be denied the chance to learn Spanish to quite a high level. Spanish is exerting increasing influence, particularly among the young. This is coupled with the fact that, for many people, the stigma attached to illiteracy means rejecting the local language. Further, because of the lack of standardisation of local languages, many people find local languages difficult to write.

There is also the problem that indigenous languages are fast becoming obsolete because parents, particularly mothers, do not use the mother tongue with their children anymore. With the neglect of their languages these minority indigenous populations are also losing their cultural identity. Mother tongues provide a link between the first important learning phase (family or intimate learning) in a child's life and the second basic education phase.

Women and children among the Indian populations have the highest incidence of illiteracy. For indigenous women illiteracy and poverty are closely intertwined. Women also lack proficiency in the Spanish language, and are less likely than men to be bilingual. This is an acute problem and, on account of this, a potential for early learning and cultural self-confidence, normally acquired in the family, is being negated or devalued.

The success of children in the basic education phase depends on the mother's competency in the second language. Therefore women, as transmitters of language and culture in society, should be included in adult learning with a strong intercultural and bilingual component. This is crucial for the literacy of future adults.

Since the 1970s cultural identity has become an ever present factor in improving people's life conditions. In Bolivia, the question of interculturality and the right to bilingual education is now officially recognised. In Guatemala also the constitution states that literacy should be bilingual. Literacy in the mother tongue is taken seriously and almost everybody learns to read and write in it. Mother tongues strengthen people's capacity to learn other languages. However, it is generally felt that though the mother tongue is very important and should be protected by law, this should not deny the right to choose how far people wish to study in an international language.

Indigenous organisations have played a key role in education reforms in Latin America as well as in bilingual adult education programmes. The participation of local communities has been crucial in the promotion of bilingual education. They have served as experts, strengthening the recognition of local languages.

The "assamblea del pueblo" (Village council), founded in the late 80s in Bolivia, plays a crucial role in the revitalisation of ethnic cultures and languages. It has also established important networks with organisations addressing cultural identity and bilingualism in Latin America. Its major endeavours are:

- promoting the participation of local communities in the design, formulation and execution of literacy programmes;
- utilising to the fullest human capacities available in local organisation;
- pressing for constitutional reform to give indigenous people greater power of expression;
- the permanent negotiation of communities with the government and official agencies;
- in particular, elders in the organisation have examined key words in the local language, recognising them for use in the educational process.

The right to associate and participate actively in organisations has been crucial for local organisations in promoting local languages. International organisations and governments should recognise the importance of indigenous organisations and should work directly with them.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Another factor in adult learning programmes in Latin America is the importance given to bilingual post-literacy. Guatemala, for example, sees itself as being in a post-literacy phase, the focus of which is to consolidate literacy skills, to further and sustain literacy. Bilingual post-literacy is recognised by the state as an essential part of adult basic education. Guatemala is promoting literacy in 15 local languages. The Academy of Maya Languages (all 24 languages in Guatemala are of Mayan origin) has the aim of establishing a universal Maya language, by unifying various local languages. This is done by interpreting the meanings between languages.

In Latin America there seems to be a plethora of very interesting debates, ideas and experiences on language and literacy. In the design of programmes a great deal of attention is given to:

- recognising the value of the native language and culture;
- promoting the value of culture in bilingual literacy;
- integrating local languages and cultures into the educational process;
- strengthening and enhancing individual and cultural identities through bilingual literacy.

The African situation

The downgrading and degradation of indigenous African languages in Africa during the colonial period and through neocolonialism and its ideology has produced a situation where African languages are in grave danger, and extra support for them is needed in the schools.

The low level of literacy in many African countries is closely linked to the poor quality of basic education. Basic education services are not universally available; rural schools are poor in quality; basic education is low in impact and sustainability; basic education is ineffective in imparting knowledge, skills and habits appropriate for full social and economic participation in society; poverty as well as poor transportation to schools, especially in urban areas, hampers participation in basic education; education is through the medium of a foreign language.

Governments in many African countries are promoting the development of indigenous languages in both formal or non-formal literacy programmes. This, as in Ghana, is seen as fundamental for learning other languages. Local languages are used for teaching from pre-school up to the third year. Only in the fourth year is the shift made to English. This is often a problem for pupils unable to understand English, as well as for teachers forced to use local language to explain the new English terms. At the senior secondary level, pupils choose from 11 local languages, which are being encouraged at the teacher training level, the tertiary level and the literacy level, as well as by radio. Only seven of the 60 local languages are used in radio programmes. The reason given for official recognition of only 11 out of 60 local languages is a lack of learning materials for each of these languages, and the lack of trained teachers or facilitators to teach these various languages.

In the attempt to foster local languages, governments have established special university departments to study indigenous local languages and to train teachers in them. However, it is not enough to teach trainers the language, they should know the social context, literacy theory and the culture.

The government philosophy is to support literacy in the mother tongue, the assumption being that literacy skills can best be learned that way. For most Ghanaians, the mother tongue is the most effective channel through which to relate to their environment.

Some aspects of the Ghanaian functional literacy programme

The government of Ghana piloted a functional literacy programme in 1987 with the support of the World Bank, DFID and the NORAD. Ghana is a multilingual state with approximately 18.3 million inhabitants using over 60 different languages. English, the official language, is mastered by only a few. Many of the local languages have never previously been written. The literacy programme was conducted on a nation-wide basis in 1991. Some aspects of this programme are as follows:

- About 80 per cent of the learners are under the age of 45;
- 30 per cent of them are below 15 years;
- The literacy classes are being held in 15 Ghanaian languages, spoken by 95 per cent of the population;
- 91 per cent of the learners enrolled in 1995 cover 8 of these 15 languages, and a meagre 9 per cent cover the remaining seven. This makes the unit cost in the minor languages higher than in the major languages;
- Instructions pivot around a literacy primer which contains 28 themes geared to the relevant need of the target group;
- Language diversity is greater in bigger towns than in smaller towns;
- Because of migration, it has been difficult to find enough teachers for the northern languages in the south, and vice versa;
- The choice of the language often depends on emotional links and individual ambitions;
- Very often learners refuse to learn a language because of local conflicts;
- Since English is the official language, there is often a very high demand to have literacy classes in English. Currently, 20 classes are held in English.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The pedagogical and organisational burden for implementing adult literacy programmes in 15 languages is massive. It exceeds the state financial allocation to basic education of adults. However, policy guidelines as to whether literacy in Ghanaian languages is to be seen as end product or intermediate step to literacy in English, are still not clearly defined. If literacy in the local languages is to be an end product, then a literate environment for these languages must be established and developed.

In the discussion about literacy programmes for adults it needs to be clear whether the object is to transfer technical skills – how to encode and decode the sign/sound relationship – or whether it is to address deeper notions of self, of identity and the nature of knowledge. Adult literacy programmes should be clear about the cultural and ideological implications of transmitting literacy practices from one cultural group to another.

A major problem is that indigenous people are often forced to learn other languages for the simple reason that their own languages were never previously written. As a result many indigenous people are familiar with other local languages as their second mother tongue even before they start formal schooling.

In many African countries, if the education system is to meet the demands of the changing economy, then there is no alternative route to adult literacy than through bilingual education.

Cameroon Literacy Education and Development Project (CLED)

A new approach to adult literacy was initiated in Cameroon in 1995, within the institutional framework of the National Association of Cameroon Language Committee. This institution includes a centre for applied linguistics, providing expertise in multilingual education and literacy, and is part of the effort of finding new ways of making Cameroon society literate.

Cameroon is the most multilingual country in Africa, with a population of 134 million people and 250 languages. The National Research Project for Language Education has developed a model for teaching a mother tongue plus a first and second official language. 12 languages are being taught in the school system.

In 1992 this knowledge was applied to the adult literacy programmes, giving birth to the Cameroon Literacy Education and Development Project (CLED) in 1995. Under this project 40 languages are being taught. The philosophy behind this approach is to put basic human needs before economic growth, giving communities a greater opportunity to develop their own language. Two elements have contributed to the success of the Cameroon literacy programme. The first is the grouping of village communities into municipalities for coordinating activities, including literacy programmes This is the smallest governmental structure, not exceeding 10,000 people. The second is the establishment of the African economic community embodied in the Treaty of Aboudja, June 3 1991 and effective from May 12 1994. This treaty provides formulae to integrate all sectors, including quality education in Africa within 34 years.

Compared to the prevalent approach to adult literacy, the new elements in the CLED model include:

- multilingualism;
- the central role of local languages and local language committees;
- bridging mother tongue literacy and national language;
- linking adult literacy and local development projects.

Following this model, a literacy programme is normally:

- bilingual in a mother tongue plus English or French;
- the first official language is preceded by literacy in the mother tongue;
- those who are already literate in French or in English get involved in literacy in the mother tongues;
- trilingual literacy is considered to be the ideal.

This new approach is a long term project which is mobilising forty other language committees through a variety of nationally coordinated activities. These include planning, training, materials development, implementation, evaluation and partnership development with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Language and adult literacy policy

Language and literacy policy in many developing countries follows a model in which literacy in the mother tongue is seen as a bridge to learning a second language. However, even at the technical level, the decoding skills of mother tongue literacy do not transfer straightforwardly to a second language. The situation becomes more complex when social meaning and cultural notions and uses of literacy are transferred from mother tongue to, say, English literacy.

The policy of maintaining the mother tongue may well be important for political and cultural reasons. But this should involve mother tongue literacy in its own right rather than simply as a channel to second language literacy.

Policy-makers need to be clear that diversity is a vital part of globalisation. Diversity is the social reality. Dealing with this diversity will demand difficult policy choices.

In a rapidly changing world, values and perceptions of language also change. In a period of revolutionary change resisting or unlearning a second language in favour of the mother tongue may take high priority. On the other hand, in a period of rapid economic globalisation, communication in the broader global market, and accessing information sources crucial to that market, require global languages of communication; of these English appears to be establishing itself as the leader. Economic security depends upon such languages for practical communication, say, tourism, soliciting foreign investors or donors and acquisition of commercial information. By being restricted to their mother tongue, adults are either excluded from these important areas or depend on expensive translation and interpreting services.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Adult education in the mother tongue thus must be linked with at least one global language of communication. If this is already provided in primary schools, then it should become an essential learning objective of any emancipatory adult learning system.

The didactics and methodology of imparting language skills in a global language of communication have to address the following issues:

- they must be directed towards the very learners who will use language skills;
- the learners should immediately experience the applicability of the newly acquired language skills;
- the development of simple language units requires cooperation in international research. This must analyse the respective learning requirements and environments as well as the uses for the language;
- new didactics and methods have to be developed that give equal consideration to everyday use of the language of communication and learning environments outside the school system;
- both old and new media should be deployed. Research must address the difference between oral and written communication, their different skills and learning techniques;
- new approaches should be developed – such as workshops, conversation groups and specialist publications – for imparting language skills.

Follow-up

Follow-up to the workshop will include meetings and discussions on how experiments in introducing local languages into adult literacy processes have been conducted, their successes and failures, the performance parameters and reasons for success or failure, including:

- degree of acceptance among the target population;
- methodologies employed;
- the issue of language status;
- procedures and criteria for choice;
- problems engendered by such choices;
- where choices are arbitrary, how can they be rationalised?
- what activities need to be carried out to further this?
- how can language management become a reality?
- what is the future of the relationships between local and foreign languages, when the latter are official?
- if the methodology led to failure, how can it be a "state of the art"?
- a summary, being a thorough examination of the current situation, with the aim of improving it.

What will be at issue is no longer the relevance of using local languages, but the ways in which they are used in adult education, and thus to promote a literate environment in those local languages. Following on these issues it will be necessary to revise the various methodologies and lobby the decision-makers.

In the development of bilingual or multilingual literacy programmes, the participation of target groups, their interests and expectations must be taken into account right from the planning stage through to their final implementation.

This document can be freely reproduced. It would be appreciated if a copy of any publication reproducing this text in full or in part could be sent to: Publications Department, UNESCO Institute for Education.

The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

Theme 3

Ensuring universal rights to literacy and basic education

Booklets under this theme:

a Literacy in the world and its major regions
b Literacy and learning strategies
c Literacy, education and social development
d Literacy research, evaluation and statistics
e Literacy in multilingual/intercultural settings
f Literacy and technology
g Literacy for tomorrow